

The President's Cabinet

By Sharon Fabian

How can one person possibly know everything that he needs to know to be in charge of a whole country? The answer is - he can't. That is why each new president takes on one very important task before his inauguration day. That task is choosing his cabinet.

The president's cabinet is a group of advisors. One is chosen for each area that the president needs to know about.

George Washington chose a cabinet. He chose four advisors. He chose a Secretary of State to advise him on foreign affairs. He chose a Secretary of the Treasury for advice on money matters. He chose a Secretary of War for military advice. Finally, for legal advice, he chose an Attorney General.



Today, presidents still fill the same four cabinet positions. Instead of Secretary of War, they name a Secretary of Defense. The other three are just the same as in Washington's time. Modern presidents also choose additional cabinet officials.

There are now fifteen advisors in the president's cabinet. There is a Secretary of Agriculture to advise on matters related to farming. There is a Secretary of Commerce to advise on business matters. And there is a Secretary of Labor to advise the presidents about workers and unions. There are also secretaries of Health and Human services, Housing and Development, Transportation, Energy, Education, and Veterans Affairs. Finally, the newest cabinet advisor, added by President Bush, is the Secretary of Homeland Security.

The Postmaster General used to be in the cabinet but no longer is. The Ambassador to the United Nations was dropped from cabinet status but may be brought back later.

The four cabinet posts chosen by George Washington - State, Treasury, Defense, and Attorney General - are still considered the most important.

Now, some non-cabinet jobs in the White House are also becoming important--three positions in particular. One is the White House Chief of Staff. He is the president's closest advisor on many topics. The Director of the Office of Management and Budget is another important non-cabinet advisor. So is the National Security Advisor.

Cabinet secretaries have an important role in addition to advising the president. They are all in the line of succession in case the president dies while in office.

The vice-president is first in line to become president. Next is the Speaker of the House and then the President Pro Tempore of the Senate. The cabinet secretaries follow. First is the Secretary of State. Next, the Secretary of the Treasury. Next, the Secretary of Defense, and so on. Last in line is the Secretary of Homeland Security.

The president meets with his cabinet at least once a week. They sit around a big table. The president sits in the middle. His most important advisors sit near him. The vice-president sits across from the president. The Secretaries of State and Defense sit on either side of the president. The Secretary of the Treasury and the Attorney General sit on either side of the vice-president. The others fill in the rest of the table.

With everyone seated at the big table, there is a wealth of knowledge in the room. The president can receive advice on any topic. He will need it to make important decisions.

Name _____



Date _____

The President's Cabinet

Questions

_____ 1. The cabinet is a group of _____ to the president.

- A. senators
- B. applicants
- C. opponents
- D. advisors

_____ 2. President _____ chose the first cabinet.

- A. Jefferson
- B. Washington
- C. Obama
- D. Bush

_____ 3. The cabinet included advisors for which area(s)?

- A. foreign affairs
- B. defense
- C. legal matters
- D. all of the above

_____ 4. The _____ is not a member of the cabinet.

- A. Attorney General
- B. Secretary of Homeland Security
- C. Secretary of State
- D. Postmaster General

_____ 5. _____ is an influential non-cabinet position in the White House.

- A. Secretary of Education
- B. Chief of Staff
- C. Congressman
- D. Attorney General

6. Name one area that is not represented by a cabinet position on which you think the president might need advice.

7. How often does the president receive advice from his cabinet?

Name _____



Date _____

Do you think it is important for the president to choose cabinet members who agree with his points of view? Why or why not?

Suppose that you were elected to an important office in government or in your school. What qualities would you look for in your advisors? Explain.
